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ABSTRACT

Twelve seventh grade and 23 eleventh grade students participated in a study that investigated age differences in the use of discourse planning. Subjects were given a list of games and asked to indicate which they knew well enough to explain to a peer. Subjects acting as speakers were seated at a table with a tape recorder present. Half had a listener present; half did not. Half had three minutes of planning time; half had no time at all to plan. Each subject was instructed to explain the game so that the listener (real or imagined) could then play it. Results indicated that both the amount and the level of planning increased with grade level. However, even at the higher grade level, some subjects did not plan, and most who did tried to write out their game descriptions. Overall, the findings suggest that some adolescents are unaware of the potential value of planning time and of ways in which to use it effectively when available. (FL)

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The Development of Discourse
Planning Skills in Early
and Late Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE PLANNING SKILLS IN EARLY AND LATE ADOLESCENCE

This paper reports the results of a study designed to investigate age differences in the use of discourse planning time. A hierarchy of message formulation skills was designed with which to explore strategy use by seventh- and eleventh-graders while performing a descriptive task. Results indicate a general lack of planning skill both in the frequency of usage and the types of notes used. Little effect for the availability of planning time was found on message formulation skills. This could be explained by the infrequent use of planning time and the techniques employed when planning time was used. Some evidence indicates a pattern of more frequent and sophisticated use of planning time between seventh- and eleventh-grade levels. Educational implications are discussed in terms of curriculum development and future research.

The Development of Discourse Planning Skills in Early and Late Adolescence

Research investigating the development of communicative competence has included three classes of skills essential to speakers facing communication problems: (1) interpretive skills (Shatz 1977), (2) interaction management skills (Sacks, Leavitt and Mueller 1951, Krauss and Weinheimer 1966, Shantz 1981, Flavell et al. 1968), and (3) message formulation skills. Message formulation skills consist of two sets of component skills, linguistic skills and discourse processes. The former have been shown to be affected by the presence or absence of planning time. Ochs (1979) observed and described differences in planned and unplanned discourse between children and adults. Shimanoff and Brunack (1977) found both similarities and differences between repairs made in planned and unplanned discourse.

What has not been explored is the presence of a developmental trend in the use of planning time. The purpose of this paper is to compare differences in message formulation skills in planned and unplanned discourse in early and late adolescence by studying differences in discourse processes.

Discourse processes include topic choice and treatment. Topic choice deals with what is talked about in a message. It includes items chosen by the speaker for inclusion in a message as well as those rejected. Descriptive data on what topics are commonly included in particular contexts would add to an understanding of message formulation. However, little work has explored why a speaker includes certain topics and not others.

Although research has not focused upon topic choice, some studies have used topic inclusion as a measure of effectiveness. Jarvis (1968),

for example, used the presence or absence of information in four topic categories as a measure of children's use of feedback.

A second important cluster of skills involved in discourse production is control over the manner in which a topic, once chosen, is developed. On a macro-level matters of treatment include the organization of necessary pieces of information and the strategies used to clarify them.

Among the subskills contributing to the accomplishment of message clarity are: (1) appropriate completeness, (2) organization, and (3) stylistic quality. The first, appropriate completeness, is related directly to topic choice. Once a topic is chosen for inclusion in a message, it must be developed to an appropriate level of completeness. Jarvis, in the study cited earlier, scored messages for degrees of topic development and found that message completeness also increased with age.

A second subskill is organization. Early work on message organization used recall as a measure of effectiveness in various forms of public address (Beighley 1952). Messages ordered in a "logical" fashion typically were found to be more easily learned (Laird et al. 1923). Other research has shown that as material becomes more complicated, organization grows more valuable (Beighley 1952). Recall also has been shown to be influenced by serial position. For example, a study examining newscasts in terms of recall determined that recall was better in the second half of the newscast than in the first, at the beginning or end than in the middle, and at the end rather than the beginning (Tannenbaum 1954).

Speakers' organizational strategies should serve to make it easier to comprehend the overall relationship among ideas and to see the relative importance accorded different ideas. Strategies that might be investigated include the inclusion of purpose statements, previews and summaries, signposts, classification markers, comparison-contrast formulas, and

general patterns of idea development.

Method

Subjects

Participants in the study were 12 seventh- and 23 eleventh-grade students at a Midwestern junior and senior high school. The seventh-grade students were drawn from four self-contained classrooms. These classes represented all ability levels. All seventh-grade volunteers whose parents returned letters of permission were included.

The eleventh-grade students were enrolled in English classes. To assure that the full range of ability levels were represented both the Survey of Literature class for college-bound students and the Myth class for non-college-bound students were included. All eleventh-graders who volunteered to participate and whose parents did not object to their involvement participated. The larger number of eleventh-grade participants reflects the difference in parental permission procedure.

Experimental Task

An experimental communication task that every participant could potentially perform and that was relevant to the daily lives of the students was needed. The task selected was that of describing how to play a game to a peer.

A list was made of games commonly played by junior and senior high school students. A week before the experiment was to begin volunteer students were asked to fill out a game sheet consisting of the list of games and the directions, "Place a check in front of any game you know how to play well enough to explain to another student." The game a specific participant was allowed to select to describe in the experimental session was drawn from those he or she had identified in this

pre-experimental questionnaire as one about which sufficient knowledge was possessed for explanation. This procedure was adopted to assure that there was relative similarity across speakers in their knowledge of the specific game explained. In addition, a test was made of the relative difficulty levels of the games selected across age groups. The sixty-two games were classified as of low, medium, and high difficulty levels by the experimenter. Scores from one to three for these three difficulty levels were then assigned to the games actually selected, and these scores were analyzed. No statistically significant effect for game difficulty was shown.

Procedures

Subjects were seated at a table with a tape recorder present. Half the subjects had a listener present; half did not. Half the subjects had three minutes of planning time; half had no planning time. Speakers were requested to choose a game from the game list which they knew how to play well and which their partner did not know how to play. The speaker was instructed to explain the game so that the listener (either real or imagined) could then play it.

Coding System

A set of dependent variables was developed which indexed the quality of message formation skills. Dependent variables were selected to capture elements judged essential for successful completion of the kind of descriptive task used and to provide data that would build upon and advance the literature on adolescent informative speaking and listening in general and the discourse planning in particular. Two categories of dependent variables were selected: (1) message completeness, and (2) general speaker strategies for intelligibility.

The first set of dependent variables provided measures of the overall adequacy and completeness of a speaker's message. Four content categories were identified, representing topics requiring treatment in a game description. The four content categories were:

1. Object of game. The speaker describes what is necessary to win the game, and how you know when this has been accomplished.
Example: "The person who makes the most matches wins."
2. Equipment. The speaker mentions and describes the equipment necessary to play the game. Example: "You use a regular deck of playing cards but take the Jokers out."
3. Way play is initiated. The speaker indicates how the materials are distributed and what determines who starts. Example: "You deal out seven cards to each player; the person to the left of the dealer starts."
4. Way play continues. The speaker indicates how turns are taken and what terminates the game. Example: "You go around the table; everyone keeps taking turns until someone gets rid of all their cards."

Every speaker received a score of zero to two for each topic category. Scores for completeness of topic treatment for each of the four essential topics were based upon three levels of adequacy: (1) there was no information relevant to the topic (score 0); (2) an attempt was made to provide information concerning the topic but it was inadequate or unclear (score 1); and (3) adequate information concerning the topic was given (score 2). In addition, an overall message completeness score was assigned each speaker by summing the scores across the four topic categories. Reliability between two raters was computed for a subsample of twelve subjects at each grade level resulting in a Pearson product-moment correlation of .90 for the total

score and .88, .91, .90, and .90 for the four topic categories respectively.

The second class of dependent variables was based upon identification of general strategies that contribute to the clarity of a speaker's message. The five general communicative strategies were:

1. Begins with overview. The speaker begins with the purpose of the game rather than waiting until play has been explained to indicate how the winner is determined.
2. Considers listener's prior knowledge in overview. The speaker designates genre of game (type of game) assuming the listener understands it or uses an analogy of another game with which the listener would be familiar.
3. Uses specific examples to clarify directions. The speaker uses similes and analogies or gives a sample of how the game actually progresses.
4. Takes care to avoid confusion in difficult spots. The speaker rephrases instructions, points out confusing sections, or indicates common misconceptions and dispells them.
5. Provides motivating information. The speaker mentions why the game is a good one to learn or mentions positive qualities of a game, i.e., easy, fun, etc.

Each speaker received a score for intelligibility strategy use for each of the five strategies based upon whether the strategy was absent (score 0) or present (score 1). An overall intelligibility strategy use score was computed by tallying across all five categories giving each speaker a score ranging from 0 to 5. Interrater reliability between two codings of twelve randomly selected subjects' protocols was .93 by percent of exact agreement for the total score and .79, .96., .88, 1.0, and 1.0 for the individual strategies respectively.

Results

Message Completeness as a Quality of the Speaker's Discourse

The overall quality of a speaker's message was determined by identifying the essential topics included and their level of treatment. It will be recalled that covering four topics was considered essential for adequately completing a game description task: (1) objective of game, (2) equipment, (3) the manner of the play initiation, and (4) the procedure for continuation and completion. Each speaker was assigned a score of 0-2 for each topic, depending upon the completeness and adequacy of its treatment, and these scores were summed into an overall message completeness score. Overall scores for the completeness of each speaker's message thus ranged from 0 (none of the essential topics mentioned) to 8 (all four topics adequately treated).

Consistent with past measurements of adolescent communication, the data suggested that as a whole the adolescents in the present study produced relatively incomplete messages (grand mean for overall message completeness = 3.81). The frequency distribution of scores for the topics analyzed is summarized in Table 1. Indeed, two of the four topics (object of the game and manner of play initiation) were not included at all by almost half the speakers and no topic was treated "adequately" (level 2) by more than one-third of the speakers (see Table 1). For all the topics a greater number of speakers failed to treat the topic adequately than covered it at an adequate level (see Table 1).

The primary interest of the present research was, of course, not in absolute performance, but upon the impact of age (grade-level), planning, and interaction on message quality. To assess differences due to these independent variables a three-way unweighted means analysis

of variance was carried out with the two grade levels, the presence or absence of planning, and the presence or absence of interaction as the three independent variables. The dependent variable was the overall message completeness scores based on summing across the four essential topics.

It was anticipated that the topic coverage would be more complete among the older speakers. This expectation was confirmed. A significant main effect for grade-level ($F_{1,71} = 11.63, p < .001$, with means of 2.88 for the seventh-graders and 4.27 for the eleventh-graders) demonstrated clearly that the level of message completeness by speakers increased with age. The finding is consistent with the results of studies on persuasive strategies (Allen and Brown 1977). No main effect was present for either planning or interaction.

General Strategies for Intelligibility

Five general communication strategies which contribute to message clarity were also investigated. Each speaker received a score of 0 (not present) or 1 (present) for each strategy. An overall intelligibility strategy use score was calculated by totaling the number of strategies used (0-5). Strategy frequencies are reported in Table 2. All four categories showed statistically significant Chi-squares.

These data suggest again that adolescents are generally quite poor at handling complex informative communication tasks like the one employed in this study. The grand mean for overall intelligibility strategy use (.53) reflected a general failure of participants to use general strategies for clarity on the present task. While the first three strategies were occasionally used, the final two were almost never used. This could be because speakers are unaware that particular parts of the directions were potentially more confusing than others and felt it was not their

responsibility to motivate the listener to want to learn the game. Once again the fact that none of the general intelligibility strategies was present in the messages of more than one-quarter of the speakers reaffirms the picture of adolescent informational skills as grossly inadequate.

In order to explore the effects of grade, planning, and interaction on the use of these general intelligibility strategies a three-way analysis of variance was performed on the overall strategy-use scores. These scores were calculated by summing the scores (0 versus 1) reflecting non-use or use of the five strategies. Scores ranged from 0 (no strategies used) to 5 (all strategies used). There were no significant effects in this three-way unweighted means analysis of variance factorializing grade-level, planning, and interaction.

Discussion

General Inadequacy of Adolescent Informative Communicative Skills

In this study message completeness was assessed through analysis of four topics considered essential for an adequate game description. The infrequent inclusion of the essential topics suggests that the adolescents in this study were apparently unaware of the topics necessary for consideration in a game description. These data point to an important weakness of these students' communicative performance that is not simply a deficit in communication skills. Improvement in methods of topic development will not affect performance results if students remain unaware of what must be talked about to accomplish a specific task. However, it is clear that adolescents' control over communicative strategies to accomplish intelligibility is also seriously inadequate. Of the general strategies relevant to the present task that were investigated none were used by more than a quarter of the subjects.

The mean rate for the sum of the five strategies was only .53.

These indications of performance inadequacy are even more striking when it is recalled that the speakers in this study were dealing with a topic of their choice, one that was familiar to them.

Planning

Little effect for planning was apparent. It was anticipated that the availability of planning time would result in a more complete message and a wider use of general intelligibility and feedback strategies. Such was not the case. In an attempt to understand the general absence of planning effects an analysis was made of the notes used by subjects in the planning conditions. Speakers were given a score depending upon the level of planning reflected in their notes. Students who did not use the planning time scored 0; those who attempted to write out a transcript of the game description scored 1; those who used some other method of note-taking (an outline, diagram, etc.) scored 2. The scores reflect a belief that written notes represent a higher level of planning than the absence of notes. In addition, attempts to write out a transcript of the game description represent a less advanced planning technique than the production of some form of notes. The results are reported in Table 3.

It should be noted that there is at least the possibility that mental planning occurred that is not reflected in the written notes. It could even be argued that some students might plan better when using mental rather than written notes. This however, is usually true of more experienced speakers who have learned and practiced written note-taking or for a task requiring less specific and detailed content. Student exposure to note-taking is most likely to occur in English classes where they are not taught it as a prelude to oral discourse but as an aid to remembering oral or

written presentations. At the very least, the high proportion of students in the present study who used their "planning" time to write out exactly what they would say does not give evidence of great sophistication in this population's planning skills, written or purely mental.

A grade-by-planning-level Chi-square revealed significant differences between the two grade-levels in the use of planning. Eleventh-graders planned more frequently than did seventh-graders. They were also more likely to use the higher levels of planning. A comparison of inadequate planning (scores of 0 or 1) versus adequate planning (score 2) revealed significant differences between the two groups.

Two implications can be drawn from these data both of which cast doubt upon the manipulation of the planning variable. First, since thirty-seven percent of the planning condition students did not plan, the manipulation of the variable is not fully controlled. Second, the quality of planning was such that it would be of dubious value in improving the content of a message. A speaker who spent three minutes attempting to transcribe a game description word-for-word is unlikely to either cover more topics or to do so in a more comprehensive manner.

To further explore the effect of planning, an analysis of variance was computed for the effect of planning level on each of the major dependent variables (message completeness, general intelligibility strategies, and feedback management). A significant main effect for planning level was found only for the overall feedback management scores (combined number of speaker and listener interaction strategies; $F_{2,18} = 4.656$, $p < .025$). Mean scores for the three planning levels are reported in Table 4.

Significantly more feedback management was evident when speakers used the planning time to plan with notes rather than a transcript. Since the strategy content of the speaker's message did not vary with the level of planning it must be concluded that the increased interaction at higher planning levels did not produce more complete topic coverage and intelligibility strategy level scores. It is important to note that planners who scored at level two represent only a higher level of planning than the other two categories. This is not to be interpreted as meaning students receiving a score of two used adequate planning devices. In addition, increased usage of feedback management strategies does not necessarily result in higher levels and quality of feedback. Since the message content did not vary with the level of planning, the increased number of feedback management strategies at the higher level of planning may be due to some characteristic of the four listeners in that category. The small number of subjects in each cell make the results unreliable.

In summary, both the amount and level of planning increased with grade-level. However, even at the higher grade-level some subjects did not plan, and most who did tried to write out their game description. Even those who used some form of notes ought not necessarily be considered adequate planners. Thus, this study indicates a lack of adolescent planning ability, but the effect of planning on the communicative strategies requires further exploration.

Educational Implications

This study suggests some adolescents are unaware of the potential value of planning time and of ways in which to effectively use it when available. Students need to be made aware of ways in which to use planning time to help produce more effective messages.

Guidelines for topic decisions and strategies for intelligibility could be taught and their use encouraged in pre-message planning time. Planning subskills such as note-taking, previewing, sequencing, giving examples, and summarizing could be included in the language arts curriculum. Comparative use of various planning strategies could be made. Students could be offered practice opportunities using varying amounts of planning time before framing a variety of message types.

Future Research

Three major areas of future research are implied by this study. One is an examination of large numbers of adolescents in order to allow generalization of the findings reported here. In addition, the effects of planned and unplanned discourse could be explored by using various contexts and tasks. Finally, the training programs mentioned above could be tested for effectiveness in improving message formation skills and thus contribute to the development of adolescent communicative competence.

By continually adding to the understanding of planning effects and at the same time implementing and refining the pedagogical implications of the findings, speech teachers and researchers can work together to offer students an understanding of and skill in an important component on communicative competence.

TABLE 1

SPEAKER'S LEVEL OF TOPIC COVERAGE

Topic	Frequencies			Percentages			Chi-Square		Chi-Square 0,1 vs. 2
	0	1	2	0	1	2	0 vs. 1	1 vs. 2	
1. Object of Game	32	27	13	44%	38%	18%	8.08*		29.39***
2. Equipment	10	44	18	14	61	25	26.33***		18.00***
3. Play Initiation	33	15	24	46	21	33	6.75*		9.66**
4. Play Continuation	17	32	23	24	44	32	4.75*		9.39**

N = 72

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES OF GENERAL INTELLIGIBILITY STRATEGIES

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-Square (Use vs. No-Use)
1. Begins with an overview	8	11%	43.56 ***
2. Considers listener's knowledge	10	14	37.55 ***
3. Uses specific examples	15	21	24.50 ***
4. Avoids confusion	1	1	68.06 ***
5. Provides motivational statements	4	6	56.89 ***

N = 72

p < .001

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF PLANNING LEVELS

Planning Level	Seventh-Grade		Eleventh-Grade		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
0 No Planning	7	58%	6	26%	13	37%
1 Transcript	5	42	11	48	16	46
2 Notes	0	0	6	26	6	17

Grade-Level N = 35 by Planning Chi-squares = 5.40, $p < .05$

0,1 versus 2 Chi-square = 15.11, $p < .001$

TABLE 4

MEAN NUMBER OF FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR
SPEAKERS AND LISTENERS COMBINED AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PLANNING

Planning Level	
No planning	1.82
Transcript	3.00
Notes	13.00

(N = 19)

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